




**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS**

ROADBLOCKS

**SEGMENT #2: DEALING WITH CHALLENGING
COLLEAGUES AND ADMINISTRATORS**



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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS

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Professional Development Toolkit for New and Beginning Teachers



The PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS is a research-based video streamed program with accompanying resource documents. The program is an outgrowth of a previous Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) online mentoring study at Virginia Commonwealth University. The findings of the online mentoring study revealed twelve topics new and beginning teachers felt additional university training would have led them to more effective use of best practices in the classroom. In this program, each of the twelve topics is presented in two to six stand alone video segments. The total number of segments is forty five. Suggested uses, in addition to personal viewing by K-12 teachers for self improvement, include professional development, mentor and mentee, university prospective teacher, and small or large group training.

The facilitators are university faculty and practitioners with field experience. Each is currently involved in teacher training or serves as a staff development administrator. All are currently engaged in educational research, teaching and/or educational policy development.

The teachers in the video programs are classroom teachers. Some of them were participants in the 2006 Online Mentoring Study in which the topics for this project were identified. They represent all disciplines in K-12 grades.

Resource documents for the programs are provided as PDF files to facilitate the use of the 45 video segments. The first set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) an introduction to program facilitators, including a definition of each topic, and a list of the video segments, and (3) a research formative study summary that helped to guide the project's development. The second set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) a full text transcript for each video segment, (3) a set of problems and solutions related to each video segment in the form of a work-study guide, and (4) an annotated bibliographic summary of references and Internet links for each transcript. Many of the organizations and agencies referenced in the transcripts are actively involved in the development of video and professional development presentations that support policy and advocacy.

Every reasonable effort is made to present current and accurate information. Internet content, however, does appear, disappear and change over time. CEPI, as a university-based educational policy research institute endorses no specific position of any listed group.

ROADBLOCKS

SEGMENT #2: DEALING WITH CHALLENGING COLLEAGUES AND ADMINISTRATORS

VIDEO SEGMENT TRANSCRIPT

Roadblocks: Battlefield barriers (perceived or real) that inhibit success. Barriers may relate to professionalism, ethics and personal growth.

Facilitator: Dr. [Joan Rhodes](#), Assistant Professor
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AUDIO	VIDEO
<p>When we begin to think of roadblocks to our success, many items may come to mind. New teachers may experience difficulty with feelings of isolation, paperwork and other administrative demands, parent interactions or disruptive students. Other than paperwork, most roadblocks center on our interpersonal relationships in the school environment.</p> <p>My name is Joan Rhodes. I am a professor in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. Today I would like to share some ideas for turning barriers into positive experiences. In this segment, we will specifically talk about roadblocks related to dealing with challenging colleagues and administrators in the workplace.</p> <p>In his book, <i>Dealing with Difficult People</i>, Roy Lilley points out two important rules. The first rule states, "there is no such thing as a difficult person, there are just people we need to learn to deal with..." and the second rule suggests, that we reread the first rule. More seriously, though, what can we do to learn to improve our relationships with challenging colleagues and administrators?</p> <p>Colleagues and supervisors have a variety of temperaments, personalities and expectations. Generally speaking after we get to know a person, we also know how they behave in the workplace. One of the most challenging types of people to deal with in a work environment is the person who behaves erratically. Unpredictable behavior, the kind that keeps you guessing, can be intimidating and manipulative. Psychologist, Mando Pelusi, suggests that we remain rational when dealing with this type of difficult person. We should try to avoid our natural tendency to become defensive in responding to erratic behavior or criticism. When required to respond to an antagonist, its best to show an interest in communicating by asking what is</p>	<p>DR. RHODES</p>

upsetting them rather than getting involved in an argument. If possible, try to find one small element of truth that you can agree with in the communication. By finding something to agree upon, you may be able to defuse the emotional nature of the interaction. Try to reiterate the person's concern to demonstrate a willingness to understand how they are feeling. Resisting the urge to argue can be difficult, but ultimately it is most helpful. Instead ask questions and listen to the difficult person's response to help guide them to other possible solutions to whatever challenge is upsetting them.

The important thing to remember is that we do not want to let difficult colleagues and administrators bring out the worst in us. Dealing with negativity on a daily basis can take a toll on our health and well being as well as reduce our productivity. To regain control we need to change the way we respond to difficult people and avoid three common emotional pitfalls: outrage, obsession and hurt feelings. If you feel your blood boiling when you interact with a difficult co-worker, try to be assertive without becoming aggressive. State the facts while keeping in the back of your mind that the difficult person's inappropriate actions are not about you. If you find that you are becoming obsessed with the behavior of a difficult person, you are also harboring expectations that there is a correct way to behave that applies to everyone. Pelusi, proposes that we should "challenge our inner demand for uniform, fair, or kind treatment." He suggests that we recognize that some people will be inappropriate obstacles and we must swerve around them rather than collide with them. By lowering our expectations of their behavior, we can turn our obsession to annoyance. Finally, when dealing with difficult people in the workplace, we must ask ourselves if we are allowing our feelings to be hurt by negative interactions. Difficult people take advantage of vulnerability and need for approval. If we practice to change our emotional response from one of hurt feelings to indifference by visualizing, we can become calmer in real situations.

Ensuring that our schools are places of collegiality and respect requires each employee to do their part to have positive interpersonal relationships. We must deal with the behavior of difficult people, whether they are co-workers, supervisors or other members of the school community. If we ignore inappropriate behavior, we are in fact accepting it. Lucy Hansford, a communications specialist for the Jackson, Mississippi Public Schools, supported school employees in becoming more responsive within their community by providing these cornerstones for dealing with demanding or difficult people:

- Let people have their say without interruption. (Venting allows people to move toward finding a solution.)
- Express empathy for ideas shared. (Showing that you understand what a difficult person is saying is important.)
- Avoid a standoff. (Try to focus on what you are able to do rather than barriers to a solution.)

- Suggest solutions and affirm the steps you will take. (When you develop a plan you help resolve problems.)
- Follow through on what you agreed to do. (Be part of the solution to difficult situations by being consistent in your own behavior.)

These steps have been very effective in creating a customer-service oriented work place and positive work environment in the schools.

Let's hear a teacher about how she or another classroom teacher resolved an issue that related to a challenging colleague or administrator in their first years of teaching and how they approach such issues today.

My name is Andrea Prisco. I was in the classroom for eight years and for the past three years I have been a resource teacher. Over the course of my eleven years in education, I have dealt with several difficult or challenging colleagues. I have worked with colleagues who are negative, domineering, impolite, and who were not team players.

ANDREA PRISCO

In the beginning of my career, I just dealt with or tried to avoid the difficult person hoping the situation would get better, which was never the case. I have found there are several things you can do to help smooth out the situation.

First, always be professional and positive. Many people will try to draw you into a confrontation. When someone tries to do this, I respond with a positive statement and smile.

Second, never say anything in anger. If I am upset or frustrated with a colleague, I never respond to an email or have a conversation with them until I have had time to cool off. I sleep on it and have the conversation the next day.

Third, be willing to take ownership. Look at yourself as to what part you played in the situation. Typically there is always something you could have said in a different way.

Finally, be honest and upfront. When I do have a conversation with a colleague, I express my concerns and/or frustrations. I always make sure to use non-threatening language and brainstorm solutions to solve the problem.

My name is Melissa Bryant. I am a high school Marketing teacher and I am currently in my second year of teaching. As a new teacher, all colleagues (besides the ladies in my department) and all administrators were challenging. I was a very shy first year teacher. As a result I was scared to ask anyone for assistance, speak to other colleagues, or administrators in particular. I felt if I asked for assistance from my school administrators they would view me as a teacher who could not properly do her job. With the help of my department chair, I worked through my shyness and I quickly found my initial thoughts not to be the case. The administration at my

MELISSA BRYANT

<p>school is one that is full of support for the teachers who work under them. I have been lucky to work with the same principal both of my years, and he has gone out of his way to make me, along with all the other teachers feel welcomed. He has an open door policy. As a result, if there is an issue, or we need assistance at any given time, all we have to do is ask, and our principal does what he can to assist.</p> <p>Both teachers have shared important information regarding how to approach challenging colleagues. Whether you are a first year teacher or an experienced educator dealing with erratic behavior in the workplace can be a source of concern and stress. By limiting our emotional response to volatile situations and people, we are better able to arrive at positive solutions to problems in the work place.</p>	<p>DR. RHODES</p>
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PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Roadblocks: Battlefield barriers (perceived or real) that inhibit success. Barriers may relate to professionalism, ethics and personal growth.

Ask yourself:

What factors are impacting the quality of your teaching and keeping you from celebrating your successes?

Suggested use for this module:

1. Analyze:

Please select one of the scenarios below and problem-solve a list of possible solutions. Record your ideas in the space provided. Discuss these ideas with your other educators (mentor, colleagues, or other beginning teachers).

2. View:

Watch the corresponding video on this topic. How does this information change your ideas?

3. Compare:

Revisit the scenario selected. Next, review the section entitled, "Possible Solutions" comparing the ideas listed with your own list.

4. Reflect:

How will you apply this new information to your current or future classroom? What goal will you set to help you begin to change your practices? What support is needed to help you accomplish this goal?

5. Apply:

List the first step towards change below. Create a timeline for success and place deadlines in your personal planner as a reminder. How will you know when you have met your goals?

Scenarios 1 & 2: Roadblocks

Scenario 1: Your goals collide with someone else, 'The Custodian'

Ms. Martin is the last teacher in her building that was hired this academic year. The number of projected students was too low and her teaching position was created just a week before the start of the school year. The school administration had to search for everything that she needed for her classroom including books, materials, furniture, computers, and even a place for her to be located near the other 5th grade classes. Mr. McDonald is the school custodian. He has been hostile since the start

of the year when he had to relocate items that he had placed in the classrooms of other teachers. Yesterday, Ms. Martin had the students sit in cooperative groups by putting the desks into groupings to conduct an activity. At the end of the school day, the custodian stops by to inform Ms. Martin that she can no longer move the furniture in her classroom since it makes cleaning the classroom more difficult. How should she respond to Mr. McDonald?

Scenario 2: Reflections on your values

It is almost time for spring break! It is hard to believe how quickly this year has gone by. Although her administration and colleagues are telling her that she is doing a good job, Ms. Allen is beginning to feel like she is not making a difference with her students. She worries that they will not be prepared at the end of the academic year. As Ms. Allen glances up at the clock, she realizes that another planning time is almost over. How should she determine her success this year?

Circle the scenario that you selected below:

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Record a list of your own possible solutions here:

Summary & Goal Setting:

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Begin by asking yourself: How will your relationships with others within the school community enhance or interfere with the learning that occurs in your classroom?

Educators must develop relationships with others which have the opportunity to build or interfere with the learning process. These individuals include secretaries, custodians, coaches, psychologists, reading or math specialist, nurses, attendance officers, school board members, PTA officers, parents, business leaders, and other colleagues.

When a problem arises, stop to consider the underlying ramifications of this issue.

Determine:

1. Is the problem owned by another person? If so, do you even need to respond to the situation? How will you build positive communications with this individual?
2. Is the problem owned by you? If so, what will you do to change your own behavior to become more successful? How will you apologize or make amends for the difficulties that occurred?
3. Is the problem owned by both of you? Can you collaborate together to find a creative solution that both individuals can be happy with.

When you feel uncertain about your teaching roles, use reflection to help you overcome these barriers. Reflection will help you analyze and guide your own development and will improve your day-to-day activities.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What am I learning about my students?
- What am I learning about myself?
- As I look back over my teaching today, what makes me most proud and what makes me feel embarrassed?
- If I could teach this again, what would I change and why?

Self-reflection and reflecting with other educators will enable you to solve problems, question assumptions, and improve your practices. Sometimes teachers get so bogged down with the stuff (reports, student needs, administrative demands, parental requests, curriculum meetings, standards, and assessments) that they lose sight of what will make the most difference in the classroom. Exemplary educators must focus on building student success and improving the quality of instruction in the classroom.

Recall three or four of your favorite teachers. Make a list of the characteristics that you remember about them. How can you incorporate these skills into your own classroom?

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- ❖ There often is no system in place for new teachers to share, vent, or cut through a feeling isolation in the classroom.

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<http://www.ask.com/bar?q=A+better+beginning%3A+helping+new+teachers+survive+and+thrive&page=1&qsrc=0&ab=1&u=http%3A%2F%2Fapeonline.org%2FNEA-Teacher-Quality-A-Better-Beginning-Helping-new-teachers-survive-and-thrive.htm>

- ❖ Working environments may also serve as inhibitors to successful teaching experiences. Inhibitors include:
 - Physical features of buildings, equipment, and resources, which serve as a platform for teachers' work.
 - Organizational structures that define teachers' formal positions and relationships with others in the school, such as lines of authority, workload, autonomy, and supervisory arrangements
 - The sociological features that shape how teachers experience their work, including their roles, status, and the characteristics of their students and peers
 - The political features of their organization, such as whether teachers have opportunities to participate in important decisions
 - The cultural features of the school as a workplace that influence teachers' interpretation of what they do and their commitments, such as values, traditions, and norms
 - The psychological features of the environment that may sustain or deplete teachers personally, such as the meaningfulness of what they do day to day or the opportunities they find for learning and growth
 - The educational features, such as curriculum and testing policies, that may enhance or constrain what teachers can teach

Johnson, Susan Moore. (2006). *Workplace matters: teacher quality, retention, and effectiveness.* (ERIC Document Retrieval Service No. Ed 495822)

- ❖ An effective new teacher support system is:
 - Designed, established, and funded at the district level
 - Overseen by a committee
 - Available to all new teachers,
 - Mentor-based
 - Introduced with new teacher orientation
 - Mindful of new teacher assignments
 - Supportive of collaborative learning
 - Sensitive to a new teacher's basic needs
 - Rich with professional development opportunities
 - Helpful to school administrators

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